

[70 cont.]

- 278 the magico-curative value of the plant under discussion: "Some-
757 times," says Castiglione, "as has been said, this popularity"
(that of medicinal plants) "is derived from real therapeutic quali-
ties as, for example, the use of quina roots, which is prescribed
by scientific medicine; its power to cure intermittent fevers was
well known among the peoples of pre-Columbian America. In
278 many other cases the virtues of these plants depend on their ap-
755 pearance, on the similarity of their roots, their flowers, or their
fruit to certain characteristics of sicknesses or to some organ of
the body." (48) Somewhat earlier, in referring to this second

48. Castiglioni, Op. cit., VI, 82.

category of plants, he tells us: "The second category embraces
innumerable substances which by themselves, speaking objectively,
cannot in any way have any effect, either favorable or unfavora-
ble, but whose value stems exclusively and directly from the
ideas they provoke in the minds of the people concerned." (49).

49. Castiglioni, Op. cit., VI, 81.

The influence of magic in medicine is borne out, finally,
by the custom of visiting the Arhuaco doctors, in whom they see
powerful magicians who possess the secret of praying to a powerful
spirit to impregnate their remedies with its essence. It is this
aspect which attracts the Guajiro, not the plants in themselves
but the spirit, the demon if we may call it so, that is present
in the drops which have been prayed over by the Arhuaco curer.

[71]

V

Magic and Funerals

811 With the Guajiro Indians, as with the majority of primitive
peoples, the complex ceremonial relating to death accounts for a
great part of their activities, their manner of acting, thinking, and

[71 cont.]

- 811 feeling. Not being able to understand the logical processes of life with its principal phenomena of birth, development, growth, old age, and death, the Indian looks for an explanation that agrees, at least in appearance, with his beliefs, with his limited capacity for knowledge, and he steadfastly adheres to the traditions received in cultural inheritance, traditions which all have a subjective flavor and in which the supernatural, the purely metaphysical — even within the physical phenomenon itself — dominates the intellectual and sensible panorama. If at first he attributed the phenomenon of birth to the supernatural action, far off in space, of an animal, a plant, or other object which in course of time became his totem in his mythical ancestor made divine, later his mental explorations try to find a new explanation; his totem for different causes having now lost its value and only remaining with him as a vague memory, he tries to find, let us say, a new explanation which agrees better with the reality surrounding him. Hence we find him affirming, like the Guajiro, that birth is due to the union of the masculine semen with the menstrual blood, which produces the fetus. The association, even if not exact, is not extraordinarily far from the truth in as much as the association of both these factors brings about an apparent conjunction of the same in order to accomplish the complicated processes of fertility and birth.

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177 But, in the explanation of the phenomenon of death, it is the realms of the unknown which continue to exert a major influence on the minds of primitives and, in the present case, on the minds of the Guajiro in particular. It is true that the constant influence of missionaries, colonists, traders and stock breeders, teachers and soldiers has started to change the state of things, inculcating in the Indian another class of beliefs which are not always coincident with reality, for the simple reason that three different races live together in our country, [72] and all are equally fanatical in their beliefs: the Negro with his fetishism and fantastic mythology; the Indian also with his mythology and his subjection to the spirits of the dead; and the Spaniard, as fanatic as the rest or as renegade. But it is also true that in the Indian's personality there still remains strongly impressed his primitive beliefs, his traditions accumulated over thousands of years, which